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A Circular, explanatory ...
New Haven, August, 1830.

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A
CIRCULAR,
EXPLANATORY OF THE RECENT PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
SOPHOMORE CLASS,
IN
YALE COLLEGE.

NEW-HAVEN, AUGUST, 1830.



A CIRCULAR.

WE are necessitated by circumstances which have recently occurred, and to justify our conduct in them, to present the public the following explanation; desiring only that they would investigate our proceedings, and the causes of those proceedings, with unprejudiced minds, and not with the usual conviction, that when the young and mature are in any degree opposed, the latter must be right. We ask only a recollection of the common aphorism, 'humanum est errare,' and are willing to abide by the decision of any, who will examine our measures with these words before them.

Upon Wednesday, the 28th of July, the Sophomore Class transmitted a petition to the Faculty of Yale College, requesting permission to explain Conic Sections from the book, and not to demonstrate them from the figures, as a *few* preceding classes had done. This arose not from a desire to render the study easier; but from the understanding that the Faculty had decided, the Conic Sections should be finished before the conclusion of the term. This was impracticable, in consequence of their commencement having been postponed to a later period, than ever before, through the introduction of another branch, for the first time, into the course, without the allotment of such lessons, as were beyond the capacity of the vast majority of any class. To this petition no answer has ever been received.

The class again convened, and resolved, in order to place the members on an equality, and to allow no undue advantages, to those who had previously examined the propositions, at the next recitation to explain, and not demonstrate the lesson; and in this they were

supported by the declaration of the Faculty to several individuals, that the lesson was inattainable, during the hours prescribed by the laws, to any ordinary intellect; and many persons moreover who were ignorant of the intentions of the class, through their absence from the meeting, attended recitation prepared to recite through absolute necessity in the manner we have mentioned. And here we must remark upon the manner of studying mathematics, publicly recommended by the Faculty themselves. Whenever any task is disproportionate, they direct each individual according to his capacity, to learn a quarter, a third, or a half of it by heart, so as to recite it glibly without perhaps comprehending it. This unfortunately often occurs, as the rapidity of the tongue is almost universally accepted, as an incontrovertible testimony of a perfect conception of the words which are uttered. Now to study a portion of mathematics, every one will of course first acquaint himself distinctly with the whole, and clearly understand the cause and derivation of every step, before he endeavors to memorize their connection, and consecution, so as to repeat them with the volubility which is estimated so extravagantly at Yale. In other words, it is extremely advantageous if hard lessons are assigned for ten days in succession, to perfect one's self in a part of each diurnal task, omit the remainder, and thus proceed until the student is at length reduced to the beneficial process of committing his mathematics to memory, through utter ignorance of the propositions which had been disregarded. The absurdity of such a mode of *mental discipline*, must be evident to every intellect. How are we to comprehend in the slightest degree, the deduction of one demonstration, if we are unacquainted with those upon which it depends. What conception could we form of the conclusions of the sixth book of Euclid, without a complete understanding of those which were provenient? The cases are precisely parallel. That this would have been the situation of those, who had not anticipated Conic Sections is apparent, from the fact, that the Faculty stated their persuasion through two of the Tutors, of almost every individual's having overlooked the study, before it was commenced, and that the apportionment of the lessons was graduated accordingly.

Moreover to evince beyond all controversion, the existence of such a belief, the present Sophomore class were required to perform in *three* days, what had occupied *five* with the last.

Such were the reasons of the class for appearing in the Division prepared only to explain the lesson. Their intention in this was not to set themselves in opposition to the Constituted Authority; they only believed that it might, for the day, influence their scholarship and talents in the eyes of the Faculty; but they never anticipated any punishment for agreeing to do as a body, what they were incapable of performing as individuals. Moreover, it has been customary, whenever a class believed their lessons too extended, to miss *entirely* upon them; and no censure has *ever* been inflicted. The Sophomore Class *did not refuse to recite*; they merely declared their incompetency as a body, to prepare nine pages of the most difficult Mathematics in the College Course, according to the direction of the Faculty, in the brief time allotted. Besides all this, *the preceeding Class, had refused altogether to recite a much shorter lesson at the very same place, and they were passed over in silence.* The Tutors before they commenced, informed the Students, that they were acquainted with the resolution of the morning, and that their replies to any interrogations which might be proposed, were to determine who were with, and who against the Faculty. The alternative presented was simply this; either to recite as each had prepared his lesson, and allow that he had been deterred by the vote of his Class, as all must have been, from attempting to demonstrate it from the figure, or to falsify and declare that he had been uninfluenced by this vote, and was prevented alone by his mental incapacity. Few could hesitate in such a situation. Nine persons were drawn from a box, into which all the names had been thrown; these nine declared that however impracticable it might have been for them to master the lesson, they had nevertheless been influenced in some measure by the resolution. The Tutors then discontinued the recitation by declaring they would extend the investigation no further, as it was evident the whole Class had decided upon opposition to the Constituted Authorities of the University.

So unconcious however were the class of having committed any unusual or heinous violation, that they all appeared at lecture in the afternoon. Professor Goodrich then informed them that they were all suspended until the next morning, but that the nine who had been called upon, were reserved for especial punishment. Let a liberal and equitable Public imagine the surprise of the class in learning that although they had all rendered themselves in the opinion, and according to the declaration of the Faculty, equally obnoxious to College regulations, yet the privilege was granted to a portion, but denied to others, of declaring individually that they were uninfluenced by the vote of their class. Let us appeal only to Justice: Can we find in any Human Code, any law, which will sanction any government to select from a body of equally guilty men, nine individuals, and make them the sacrifice for the offences of the whole. What would be our sentiments—what would be our indignation, did we behold a court of Justice place the names of a number of pirates, all equally degraded and criminal by their own admission, into a wheel and render the first ten who were drawn from that wheel the objects upon whom law and justice should wreak their vengeance? What would be our anger when we saw even these men, abandoned as they were, executed, and their comrades turned out upon the world, as guiltless and unoffending citizens? And where is the distinction between the justice of the cases? We can perceive none whose detection would not require that argute intellect, which

—————Can sever and divide
A hair 'twixt North and North West side."

Upon the same morning we were summoned individually to sign a paper declaring that we would recite Conic Sections in the manner prescribed. The Nine were not permitted to sign this instrument. Several others for unknown reasons, were also refused. Each Professor and Tutor (for the Students were cited before different officers) proposed different interrogations to each person. Some limiting the signification of the paper to the mere recitation of Conic Sections. Others extending it to a removal of



their names from a representation which had been delivered to the Faculty, stating that as we considered ourselves equally guilty with the nine, we were resolved to receive the same penalties with them; and others affixing various interpretations to the general terms which were to be subscribed. It is unnecessary to explain at length the object of the Faculty in this; it was evidently to graduate the future punishments, and to divide the forty-three persons, who after the others had been terrified from the Combination by the prospect of dismissal or expulsion, were still determined to participate the destiny of their Nine Class-mates, who had been driven into that extremity by a coincidence in their original views, and a contempt for the falsification which would have prevented their incidence into their present situation. Upon discerning this, the forty-three convened and directed a communication attested by themselves, to the Faculty, expressing their willingness to subscribe the paper, provided, however, it did not require a desertion of the support of the nine whose fate was still undetermined, stating also their calm, decided, and premeditated resolution, to obtain the same punishment to which they were to be subjected. This the Faculty disregarded.

We request permission, here to indicate the entirely dissimilar aspect our circumstances had assumed. We had indeed been originally involved in this difficulty, by proposing, for a single day, merely to express more distinctly to the Faculty, our general incapacity to master their task, to recite a single lesson in the only mode in which the majority were capable of performing it. For this, which was afterwards construed a breach of duty, we offered every acknowledgment within our ability. We conceded to recite Conic Sections in the designated manner,—we conceded to recite any extent of study and thus resigned the very point whose attainment had been anticipated. We conceded every thing but the dishonorable—the unfeeling desertion of those, whom accident had fixed upon as the atonement for ourselves. This we would not concede. We had not yet so far forgotten the principles of honor, integrity, and mere equity, as to cast nine unprotected persons before the Faculty, to endure without companionship whatever.

er they might choose to inflict. We had not yet been taught to believe that utility is the polar star which must direct all our actions; that when arrived at the brink of a precipice we were to permit those, whom ourselves had conducted thither, to be dashed from the summit, while we obtained security in retreat. We felt it far more honorable and far more just, to employ all our exertions for their preservation, even when we believed that those exertions might involve us in their fate. If they had offended in common with us, we had still the sensibility and reason to anticipate our sensations in future existence when recalling the occurrences of youth, we shall remember, the commencement of our career was characterised by pusillanimity, ingratitude and disgrace—that while we had continued to enjoy the advantages of an education, those who deserved it equally with ourselves, had been cast upon the world, incapacitated from admission into every institution of our country, and writhing beneath the indignation of a father, and the weeping reproaches of a mother. If their prospects for the present are to be blighted, we determined that ours too shall be destroyed—if their parents are to discard them, we determined that ours too shall have the same cause to disown us—if they are to enter the world with a *nominal* disgrace upon them, we determined that we shall commence our career beneath the same ignominy, and depend upon the reminiscence of our integrity and decision to animate, and the resources which Providence has bestowed to support us in our pursuits, and bear us, at length, to that obloquy or renown which it may be our destiny to attain.

Such then, are the principles and such the causes which have actuated our entrance and continuance in the measures we had originally adopted, upon the selection of nine of our number as a sin offering for the whole. We had now retracted as far as was practicable,—we had receded from all our requests regarding Conic Sections, and had stated to the Faculty our readiness to continue our accustomed duties, provided the nine were permitted to do the same.

Now it may be alleged by the Faculty as a demonstration of the precipitancy of our conduct, that our memorials were all pre-

sented before the promulgation of a single punishment. But this was our especial intention. We did not propose to sit humbly down until the Faculty had exacted their intended vengeance as they were pleased to hint, upon the nine, and then petition, as was done in the last rebellion, that the same sentence should be awarded us. We had sufficient providence to discern the inefficiency, —the puerility of such a course. We knew that supplications to suspend, dismiss, or expel forty-three members of a class, would be ridiculous and nugatory, when those members alone supported its respectability. To demonstrate this, it is only requisite to add, that of the thirty-nine who originally opposed, or subsequently deserted us, few only are independent of the institution for their subsistence. Our only course was to place ourselves, as had always been our object, upon an equality with the nine, by declaring the concordance of our intentions when we entered the recitation rooms in the morning, and by thus removing the objection of their oral declaration in preference to falsehood, that they had been influenced by the vote of the class. But this was not sufficient. The Faculty had fortuitously fixed upon those men, and were by their own specification about to render them an example, to terrify the factious into silence and unlimited submission. A court may indeed sentence a robber to be hung in chains, to awe his comrades and drive them from criminal pursuits. In this case it is necessary for the vital interest of a community ; but can a literary corporation be authorised, by equity, to draw nine young men by ballot, deprive them of a public education and send them home with all the disgrace which they can inflict, to the destruction of the student, and the agony of his parents ; and all this for the mere possibility of deterring seventy or eighty individuals from seditious combinations for the moment. But this we were resolved to obviate, and therefore to express fully to the Faculty the stability of our resolutions, with regard to the attainment of an equal punishment with our nine classmates, we stated explicitly, in one of our memorials, that we would transgress, if reduced to that disagreeable necessity, a sufficiency of College-regulations to render it necessary for the authorities of the institution to distribute, according to the code sanctioned by the Corporation, the same punishment

to ourselves, or rather it was our intention to break down all distinction between the nine and ourselves, and then sustain as a body whatever penalty, our unintentional violation of College statutes might require.

And here it will be well to notice the belief that may strike some minds upon perusing our representation, that we proposed to alarm the Faculty by the appearance of an incipient rebellion, and by these means to mitigate our punishment. Such an intention never once introduced itself into our proceedings. We did not desire—we would not, had it been in our power, have wished the Faculty to transgress laws, over which they possess no more influence than ourselves. We merely sought and hoped for an equal distribution of the penalties prescribed by those laws. These the gentlemen had singularly neglected to enforce. There were few of us who did not originally anticipate expulsion or at least dismissal. Our only object was to obtain it as a body, instead of permitting nine to receive it for us. These, we repeat, were our principles of action; they were at least candid and generous, but the light in which we were viewed by the Faculty themselves, was not that of open resistance; for contrary to their *express* and *invariable* custom *never to receive* communications from students in any *unlawful combinations*, they *did accept* from the hands of *our committees*, *three successive papers*, each expressing more calmly and unequivocally the opposition into which we had entered and had been compelled to continue, through their own procrastination in the simple decision of our case. Can it for one moment be supposed that the parental and affectionate government of this institution, as it is termed, would waver, and fluctuate, and delay, for six days upon what they might denominate a decided and evident infringement of the letter of the statutes, by which the Corporation had commanded them to be directed, without the consciousness that the students had proceeded “on most just grounds to this extremity!” And is it indeed credible that the majority of the class would venture to withstand the superior authority to which they had been subjected, with unwavering firmness, did they not entertain a perfect conviction of the perfect rectitude and perfect equity of their conduct?

It has been antecedently mentioned, that the Faculty, from

unimaginable causes, had prevented several other individuals besides the nine, from subscribing an instrument, whose purport was so singularly amplified and contracted, apparently to quadrate with the conjectured timidity of those who were summoned to affix their signatures. Before we proceed upon this point, we must mention that the Faculty have been fully and clearly aware of the lawful penalties we have incurred. These penalties are dismissal or expulsion. These the Faculty have hesitated to inflict upon forty-three members of a class,—they have wavered,—they have meditated,—they have procrastinated in the sole anticipation that the ardor and the madness, with which they presumed we plunged into the combination, would have wasted away, and our unanimity have been destroyed, and our numbers been decreased. Then to intimidate all others from similar combinations, through the means of the informers, who unfortunately abound in every class, they would have selected the most prominent performers in this drama, and have rendered them their victims. This conducts us to the subject on which we propose to touch.

The Faculty, still undecided upon the course to be pursued towards the nine, or rather towards us all, as we had now set it beyond their power to estimate them more guilty than us, selected three persons and dismissed them *privately*, for having been, as was declared, in the epistle to one of the gentleman's parents, *the most active instigators and conductors of a Rebellion!* The Faculty were unjust in this,—the phrase is harsh, but it is true. As they were deprived of the channels of information respecting our most active members, through the exclusion of the above mentioned informants from our number, they obeyed the suggestions of imagination and suspicion, and fixed upon three individuals as *the most active instigators and conductors of a rebellion*. This is rather discreditable to their penetration, as we can certify that two of these gentlemen have done little or nothing except add the influence of their characters to our cause.

Where then can lurk the justice of their decimating, as it were, these three gentlemen for punishment? The Faculty have for once exposed their fallibility. Whether they proceeded upon mere surmise, or concluded from the previous conduct of these individuals in college, that they were probably the most efficient prosecu-

tors and supporters of these proceedings, still they have been unjust and must be considered so, until the signification of justice shall be changed, and suspicion be admitted as an equivalent for certainty, and until collateral and antecedent circumstances be estimated as definitive as unequivocal ocular testimony. *

We will now conclude by protesting that we have used every exertion to procure a reinstatement of our body into the institution. On Monday we sent to the Faculty to inquire into the veracity of our information respecting the *final* dismissal of the three, stating at the same time if those gentlemen had been dismissed, that we thenceforward considered ourselves as *finally dismissed* from College. From this committee the Faculty refused to accept our memorial to the above effect. On Tuesday having learned that the Faculty had entirely misunderstood the grounds of our resistance, although it is questionable whether any uninterested persons would find our communications unusually tenebrose, we resolved to remove all reprobation from ourselves, and directed three gentlemen to wait upon the Faculty, and elucidate as perspicuously as practicable the determinate cause of our opposition, also to make any concessions which would not involve our desertion of the nine. The Faculty refused this committee even an audience. This absolved us from all censure, at least in our own conviction. We now consider ourselves virtually, finally dismissed from college, and will act accordingly. Any future return to the institution we have carefully placed beyond the power of any individual, or, indeed, of any less number than the whole forty-three; so that the procrastinated promulgation of our penalty, in expectation of the exercise of parental authority, to compel us to return, is entirely unavailing.

Thus have we endeavored, by a minute exposition of the various causes which have induced every step in these measures, to vindicate ourselves from the customary accusation of precipitancy, injustice and obstinacy. We did not primarily intend to resist the laws of College, but only to recite collectively, as one of the Tutors afterwards declared, he would have blamed no one for having done individually. We petitioned as the Faculty directed when we felt ourselves aggrieved; but they disregarded our request. For this the Faculty suspended the *whole class* and left them hut an immediate decision upon the most eligible course—

and the course adopted was to concede every thing except the desertion of the nine, who had been so unjustly selected for punishment. But unconditional submission was required; unconditional submission we would not grant. We were not still such infants, as to allow others to think and act for us in every case. We merely set ourselves upon an equality with the nine, by the communications transmitted to the Faculty. We did not of course wish greater punishment; but we, at least, were just enough, as those individuals were no more guilty than ourselves, to determine to receive the same penalties with them. We were anxious the moment these penalties were adjudged, if they permitted, to return to our accustomed duties; but the Faculty obstructed this, by hesitating, for seven days, to enforce the laws they were commanded to administer, and we were necessitated, for the attainment of our object, to discontinue our connection, as the nine were compelled by the Faculty to do, and lastly we were cut off, from all possibility, even of entire concession, by the Faculty's again resorting to the veracious prophecies of a ballot box, or what was in this instance an equivalent, the guidance of their own imaginations to discover and take vengeance upon the criminal "instigators and conductors of a Rebellion."

We have been induced to give this public explanation of our proceedings, as their effect must be publicly known, to prevent as far as a true exposition will prevail, the odium which generally awaits those who resist the authority of others, upon whom the community have already bestowed their confidence, respect and admiration. But we fear not to present ourselves, even under these disadvantageous circumstances. What though the clouds of prejudice may obumbrate the intellectual perception in the cold calculations of utility? These clouds are pervious to the beams of truth,—these clouds must dissipate before their influence, and leave the mind in its own unobscured and innate purity, prepared to contemplate and judge those deeds which have been actuated solely by sentiments of rectitude and honor. The light of intelligence and virtue has been too extensively diffused over the American public, to excite apprehensions of their decision, when we appeal to their reason and integrity alone. We ask them not absolutely to approve the wisdom of our primary step, though we were im-

pelled to it by necessity. We ask them not even to declare that we have proceeded with the selfish prudence of those whom a long acquaintance with the world and the interested motives which inspire the majority of mankind, has indurated to the refined principles of honor, which lights up the spirit of the youthful, and like a second conscience, incites them sometimes to precipitate, but still to honorable acts. We ask them only to acknowledge, as all our later measures have exhibited, whether they believe our course has been improvident or violent,—whether they believe our resistance to the authority we have opposed has been unjustifiable, whether they believe we have brought ignominy upon ourselves and affliction on our parents, and blighted the fair prospects which were spread before us,—that we have been inspired by principles of humanity, generosity, and honor,—by principles which, when the present occurrences shall be buried in oblivion, will obtain for us the affection of our friends and the respect of our enemies.

Such is the explanation which the committee present to the public,

ANDREW P. CALHOUN, Pendleton, S. C.	} Committee.
SHERMAN B. CANFIELD, Chardon, Ohio.	
T. DRAYTON GRIMKE, Charleston, S. C.	
JOHN THEODORE KEEP, Homer, N. Y.	
JOSEPH W. LESESNE, Georgetown, S. C.	

H. W. Archer, *Rock Run, Md.*
 G. A. Benedict, *Watertown, N. Y.*
 Ebenezer Bishop, *Woodstock, Ct.*
 Edward Brinckerhoff, *Albany, N. Y.*
 Henry T. Bulkley, *Fairfield, Ct.*
 Andrew P. Calhoun, *Pendleton, S. C.*
 Sherman B. Canfield, *Chardon, Ohio.*
 Edward Carrington, *Providence, R. I.*
 Franklin Chappell, *New-London, Ct.*
 William Dunn, *Clinton, La.*
 William Fisher *Philadelphia, Pa.*
 William Frazier. *Staunton, Va.*
 Horace B. Gould, *Glen Co. Geo.*

James A. Guernsey, *Pittsford, N. Y.*
T. Drayton Grimke, *Charleston, S. C.*
Reuben Hale, *Lewistown, Pa.*
Elkanah Hodges, *Torrington, Ct.*
John F. Hoff, *Lancaster, Pa.*
William J. Hoppin, *Providence, R. I.*
Elijah K. Hubbard, *Middletown, Ct.*
John T. Keep, *Homer, N. Y.*
Cortland L. Lattimer, *Watersford, Ct.*
Joseph W. Lesesne, *Georgetown, S. C.*
Hampden Lewis, *New-Orleans, La.*
John Little, *Edenton, N. C.*
Robert J. Livingston, *New-York City.*
J. S. Magruder, *Baltimore, Md.*
J. C. Angus Manning, *New-York City.*
A. D. McFarland, *Worcester, Mass.*
John S. Patterson, *Cincinnati, Ohio.*
Edward Reed, *Coxsackie, N. Y.*
Thomas S. Salter, *Mansfield, Ct.*
George Schley, *Frederick, Md.*
Gilbert L. Smith, *Sharon, Ct.*
Nathaniel W. Starr, *Danbury, Ct.*
John J. Steiner, *Frederick, Md.*
Alfred Stille, *Philadelphia, Pa.*
Charles W. Smith, *Poughkeepsie, N. Y.*
Henry Tennent, *Seaford, Del.*
P. A. Van Bergen, *New Baltimore, N. Y.*
W. Craig Wharton, *Philadelphia, Pa.*
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